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ABSTRACT

A general description and guidelines are presented for a program review process for departments of medical education of the administrative units within colleges of medicine. After a discussion of the purposes of reviews, a suggested review process is described. The process to be utilized should be negotiated by the principle units, the administrative coordination committee, and the dean's office. Although written review guidelines are considered essential, the review methodology is expected to be evolutionary if it is to serve the purpose of program improvement. Three components of the review are discussed: (1) administrative review and reporting (the role of the administrative coordination committee); (2) self-study; and (3) external reviews. A case study describing the experience of The Ohio State University College of Medicine (Division of Research and Evaluation in Medical Education) is included. (KM)

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SUGGESTED GUIDELINES FOR THE ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW OF OFFICES OF MEDICAL EDUCATION

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Suggested Guidelines for the Administrative Review of Offices of Medical Education

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The contents of this paper should be of interest to all who are subject to the process of departmental review — be it for accreditation purposes, program improvement, or program retrenchment. The thinking and recommendations expressed here result from experiences in program evaluation, the recent review of the Division of Research and Evaluation in Medical Education (DREME), and the combined experience of persons in the Office of Academic Affairs at The Ohio State University. In the paragraphs that follow we present a general description and some guidelines for a program review process.

The Purpose of Review

The purpose of program review is program improvement. In this context, "review" is synonomous to evalution where the emphasis is on the improvement of a unit's activities, i.e., its students and academic programs. Further, we define "program" as an integrated set of academic activities within an administrative unit with specified goals encompassing the traditional academic areas of teaching, research, and service. An administrative unit can be a department, division, office, or center within a college of medicine.

Effective organizations need to articulate their goals, test their effectiveness in meeting those goals, measure the quality and relevance of those activities, and determine how well they allocate resources and organize themselves to serve a defined mission in an academic medical center. While the need for self management and internal evaluation is essentially an ongoing activity within all organizations, there is need for a more formal process within public and private academic institutions. Program evaluation, incorporating both internal and external assessments of activities, should be considered if the final report and subsequent recommendations are to be credible in the eyes of decision makers. For the most part, the university is particularly interested in a more comprehensive review of where the program has been, where it is presently, and where it is going within the medical center. Most institutions have formal policies and guidelines to be followed whenever a program or department is scheduled for review.

Program evaluation helps an organization not only to do a better job of meeting its responsibilities but also provides a statement of accountability to the medical center and the university at large. Review can provide recognition for a unit's accomplishments as well as the information needed in order to oversee orderly development for improvement and positive change.

A Suggested Process of Review

For planning and scheduling purposes, the review process is presented here as a linear sequence of committee activities and discussions resulting in a mutual agreement and an informal report by all parties with cested interests in the program under review. In reality, this process often calls for a series of iterative steps and procedures that is anything but linear. The process should be understood by all parties involved in the evaluation, and therefore, must be negotiated by the principle unit, the Administrative Coordination Committee, and the dean's office. Written guidelines for the review are essential. However, the program review methodology should be an evolutionary process if it is to best serve its purpose of program improvement. Above all, the process must be a fair assessment of the unit's goals, activities, accomplishments and future aspirations.

Usually the process of program evaluation begins with a comparison between goals and activities by asking, "How well does what we do relate to why we do it?" Although it may not be a first step in the evaluation process, identifying and affirming mission statements, program goals, and priorities, is a necessary step in program review.

Program review and planning for improvement also depends on the critical examination of the value of the unit to the medical school and the university at large, the quality of the activities undertaken in response to the unit's mission, and the unit's responsible and effective use of resources. An understanding of goals, as they emerge from an analysis of program activities, may be more productive than starting with a preset definition of goals and objectives.

Components of Review

The following describes various aspects of a review process as it might be utilized at any academic institution. While many programs share common characteristics, no two programs or its personnel are alike. Therefore, no two units are likely to follow identical patterns for program evaluation.

Three related activities are associated with an effective review with the explicit purpose of improving the unit's performance: 1) administrative review and reporting, 2) self-study, and 3) external review.

Administrative Review and Reporting

Ultimately the success of an administrative review will be dependent upon the open communications occurring between all concerned parties and at each level of the review process; in addition to the extent to which all parties can agree on a course of acation based on the lessons learned. The most important function of the Administrative Coordination Committee, which should be appointed by the dean, is to promote communication at each stage of the process and among the various parties. In addition to serving a coordinating and facilitating role, this committee ultimately synthesizes all information and data pertaining to the review and presents a report to the dean.

The Administrative Coordination Committee has the following specific administrative tasks:

1. working with the unit under review and the self-study committee to outline the issues and delineate the self-study questions;
2. working with the unit in developing a mutually acceptable design for the external review, including the selection of the external review persons;
3. suggesting additional sources of information or methods for data gathering that would render the final report an actions document, by merging the findings of the self-study committee and the external review report;
4. coordinating the development of a course of action in a prescriptive document; and
5. monitoring the progress of implementing the course of action.

The Administrative Coordination Committee can be configured in a number of ways to serve the purposes of program review. Senior level persons, mostly faculty level constituents who are familiar with the mission of the unit, should comprise this relatively small committee. It is further recommended that one member be drawn from other campus groups that have experience in program evaluation. Most importantly, the chairperson of the committee should discuss and negotiate the plan for program review with the chairperson or director of the

unit to be reviewed prior to commencing any review activities.

Self-Study

As an initial step in the process, a group of persons within the program (i.e., department, division, office, center, etc.) begin identifying the program's goals, examining its mission, and assessing the quality and value of the program in light of its activities in the medical center. Two major purposes of the self-study are to: 1) increase the organization's awareness of what they are doing (mission, goals, objectives), how well they are doing it (quality), and what they ought to be doing (priorities), and 2) provide an information and data base that will be used in a brief self-study report for communication to the external reviewers and the Administrative Coordination Committee. The self-study must precede an invitation for an external review team to visit the institution.

In preparation for the review process, it is recommended that a self-study committee be appointed from within the department/division. The size and composition of the committee will depend on the unit under study. The department chairperson or division director will be an important resource for this committee. However, he or she should not dominate the committee deliberations or impede its progress. In units that are relatively small, the entire division can be organized through ad hoc groups to participate in the self-study activities. Ad hoc committees, each with a specific task, can make a valuable contribution to the quality of the self-study report. The process should provide information and explanation about the value and effectiveness of the unit. This step provides an opportunity for goal clarification, the review of activities and resources, and the development of critical but positive recommendations for change to support the organization's goals.

A Case Study

At The Ohio State University, College of Medicine, the Division of Research and Evaluation in Medical Education (DREME) was scheduled for a formal Administrative Review as a part of the University's policy for all academic units. Well in advance to this review, the DREME had already been engaged in a strategic planning process. The database that was developed as a result of program planning served as a primary source of information for the Division's self-study activities. Each member of the unit was actively involved in addressing a number of key issues and questions prior to a one-day retreat on program planning. During this single-day conference, subcommittees reported their recommendations and discussions took place relative to the Division's mission, goals, and activities as these pertained to the academic service roles: teaching, educational research, and professional service. Members of the Division assisted in planning the agenda for this meeting that was held off-campus. Expectations and objectives for the day were made explicit *a priori* and tasks assigned prior to the meeting. In addition, and invitation was extended to the Associate Dean for Graduate and Medical Education to attend and actively participate in this session. One product from these deliberations was a brief report that was submitted to the Associate Dean. This document, along with the unit's annual reports, budget, and other relevant documents became the essential "self-study" report. What occurred as a post-retreat activity was particularly significant. Three working committees within the Division were charged with the task of addressing several key issues identified as a result of the previous work. Several expectations for the units' personnel, as well as the Division's activites, emerged as a result of these deliberations. There was a need to clarify the Division's mission statement and goal expectations. In addition, there was the obvious need to study staffing patterns and the Division's budget. A market analysis of faculty and professional staff salaries holding positions in offices of research in medical education was the subject of another study conducted as result of our self-study.

External Review

The use of a review team external to the institution can be helpful in identifying an organization's strengths and weaknesses. Independent observers have the capacity to bring a perspective to the review process that is not possible with internal participants only. These individuals should be familiar with the role and functions of similar programs at comparable institutions. A visitation should be arranged, an agenda developed by the Administrative Coordination Committee in consultation with the program participants, and a written report be provided by the external reviewers to the committee. The role of the reviewers during this process should not be an adversarial one.

As distinguished and concerned colleagues, site visitors should be charged with helping the unit under review to see its own activities more objectively. The number of visitors, who they are, length of stay, and the issues they should consider will depend on the nature of the questions raised in the evaluation process. All parties to the review should be in agreement on these matters before invitations to external reviewers are issued.

Summary

The purpose of program review should be program improvement. The ultimate beneficiaries of a fair and thorough review process will be the program's constituents, e.g., the students in the program, faculty, and administration. Program evaluation can lead to needed change with the intended outcome to be quality of performance and program inprovement.

The need to evaluate a department, division, or office in order to ensure it is meeting its academic responsibilities will lead to recommendations for change. This fact can be counted on! Some of these recommendations may involve a reallocation of resources: human, fiscal, and physical; while some may not. Budgetary adjustments and funding priorities, which accompany most reviews, particularly during times of limited funds, are best made by an informed group of decision-makers. The importance of a dialogue and open communication between the unit under review and the various review committees cannot be overemphasized. For example, an understanding of a program's goals may well grow or even change as a consequence of the review process and the several meetings that are held to discuss these matters.

Based upon an open review process, there will be times when units will be designated for expansion, retrenchment, or even curtailment. Such important decisions must not take place with inadequate information and data. To best serve the interests of the university and the medical center, a system of review and written policy outlining the process should exist at all academic institutions.